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# Response to spousal death according to faith in traditional Chinese culture among older Chinese: Moderation by occupation

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Email: [hmpan3-c@my.cityu.edu.hk](mailto:hmpan3-c@my.cityu.edu.hk)**Abstract**

This study aims to enrich the knowledge of the effects of traditional Chinese culture on bereavement outcomes among older Chinese, and to examine the moderating role of occupation in the relationship between traditional culture and bereavement outcomes. A sample of 352 older Chinese in widowhood was interviewed by quota sampling. A scale of faith in traditional Chinese culture was developed and confirmed by factor analysis. Complicated grief (CG) functioned as the outcome variable. Results showed that faith in traditional culture did affect CG among the sample, and previous occupation moderated the effect of traditional culture on CG. That is, the effect of faith in Chinese culture on CG is stronger in the non-peasant group than the peasant group. The results broaden the knowledge of spousal bereavement in a Chinese context. Services such as death education and occupational therapy were recommended according to this study.

**KEYWORDS**

complicated grief, occupation, older adults, spousal bereavement, traditional Chinese culture

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

Grief is both a personal life experience and a culturally sensitive issue. In traditional Chinese culture, a dead person always counts as a "ghost" and draws respect from descendants, yet is seldom mentioned (Chen, 2012). This differs, to an extent, from Western society, where expression of grief is appreciated in a more straightforward way (Moats, 2010). Regarded as a taboo, death is an understudied and nebulous topic. The less frequent mentioning of death in public among Chinese people does not mean that bereavement plays a less crucial role in their life. Distresses (e.g. CG, complicated grief; depression or anxiety) have been reported among the Chinese population (He et al., 2014; Li, Chow, Shi, & Chan, 2015), just as they are among bereaved people in the west (Hooyman & Kramer, 2006; Ott, Lueger, Kelber, & Prigerson, 2007). Beyond the similar psychological burdens exist cultural implications unique to Chinese people.

Even with the shock of western culture (Chang, Wong, & Koh, 2003) traditional Chinese culture remains influential to Chinese people, particularly regarding civic harmony, prudence and industry. For example, in a survey implemented in 2007, 65.8% of the respondents wanted many of the ideas of Confucianism to remain applicable in contemporary China, and 65.6% of them agreed that Chinese people should be acquainted with a canon of Confucian classics (Liu, 2011). Among people of advanced age, this tendency is more obvious. In 2008, the ancient Qingming festival was first marked as a 3-day public holiday. At that time, people visit the tombs of their ancestors, sweep the grounds, offer food or flowers and burn incense and paper money in honour of the dead and then bow before a memorial tablet. This festival preserves the tradition of offering sacrifices and worshipping ancestors, as traditional culture highly recommends, and is one of the most important festivals in China. Over 5.4 million tomb-sweepers nationwide visited burial sites at

the Qingming festival in 2016 (Hua, 2016). Indeed, there are a series of cultural rules for teaching Chinese bereaved people how to cope with the death of people close to them.

Confucianism and Taoism are two predominant philosophical or religious strands in China, and play a significant role in both family and community life (Yick & Gupta, 2002). They are the most basic ideological foundation of Chinese society (Jung, 1998; Lee, 1995). Confucianism highlights the importance of being alive and teaches people to accept death as a natural extension of fate (Su, 2011). Death is perceived and treated in unique ways. Confucian thought holds that dead people transform into ghosts and spirits, and hence should be worshipped by descendants by means of offering sacrifices (Chen, 2012). In addition, death rituals in China are of importance, serving as one of the ways in which the value of filial piety is transmitted from generation to generation (Li, 1993). Another way to behave properly in the face of death is by keeping silent about the death of a person, which is considered a wise way to be human. Consistent with Confucian ideas, Taoist doctrines hold that widowed people should not be overwhelmed by the death of their beloved ones, but rather, they should be strong and tough, since they can still keep in touch with the immortal soul of their deceased relatives. Additionally, in the view of Taoism, the best way to bury a person after his or her death is to leave him or her surrounded by the natural world (Berkson, 2011). Therefore, the concept of *feng shui* matters a lot in Chinese people's lives, and selecting a gravesite is especially vital, since a good burial place implies that the offspring of the deceased will enjoy fortune in every aspect of their life (Li, 1993).

Many researchers have explored the effect of traditional culture on bereavement outcomes. Hui et al. (2016) claimed that fate belief, which is the recognition that events are predetermined by impersonal forces, would aggravate negative distress during bereavement. On the contrary, Ho and Brotherson (2007) suggested that a strong fate control belief is an asset to the bereaved, as it could help them attribute the loss to external forces rather than their own actions. The opposing claims might result from both the population diversity and the types of death addressed by each study. In the study of Hui et al. (2016), the mean age of the participants was about 24 years, and belief in fate control might devalue the sense of self-control, which is highly associated with mental health (Boals, vanDellen, & Banks, 2011). The second study focused on the death of children. In this context, it would be preferable to attribute the death to external causes, since the death of children before their parents is against the law of nature and counts as a bad fortune, while the death of the elderly people is natural. The older generation may strongly identify with traditional culture due to the deep influence of and long-term exposure to the cultural backdrop. Two previous studies limit the study domain to fate belief, which is one of the popular perspectives among common people from traditional Chinese culture (Schwartz, 2010). Indeed, other types of traditional culture are concomitant with fate belief and are valuable to be considered in terms of their effects on bereavement outcomes. By drawing on the main principles of Confucianism and Taoism, a scale representative of faith in

### What is known about this topic

- Beliefs in fate might be harmful to bereaved people when they deal with their grief experience.
- Professional occupation before retirement signifies a higher quality of life among older people.
- Grief is a culturally sensitive issue.

### What this paper adds

- Broadly, traditional Chinese culture can ameliorate complicated grief (CG) among the elderly people.
- Older adults who have professional occupation before retirement show more changes in CG under the influence of traditional Chinese culture than their counterparts as peasants.

traditional cultural beliefs concerning life and death can be developed from this study.

From a macro standpoint, grief is affected by the surrounding culture; however, it also varies from person to person within a society. Personal characteristics (e.g. gender, relationship, time since death) are associated with outcomes of grief (Jordan & Neimeyer, 2003). For instance, men are more likely to have physical health problems and die shortly after the death of their spouse than women are (Hooyman & Kramer, 2006). China has experienced major economic and social evolution in the past four decades as the imbalance within the rural–urban dual system has gradually narrowed. The *danwei*, as a cornerstone of urban society in Mainland China, shoulders many life burdens for the persons involved, not just their job domain (Sévigny, Chen, & Chen, 2009). However, compared to the members of any type of *danwei*, peasants need to be self-supporting to live due to the absence of social resources provided by the workplace. Therefore, Kyung-Sup (2003) concludes that Chinese-style socialism still governs the lives of most urban workers. Still, urbanisation is the keystone in the development plan drawn by the government for the future. In the study of Chen, Hicks, and While (2014), professional occupation before retirement signified a higher quality of life among older people in China due to higher socioeconomic status and social resources, such as pensions (Zhou & Wang, 2011). It is inferable that the systemic development imbalance has a profound effect on the individual life of each person involved, including their ways of dealing with major life events (e.g. the death of a spouse). This study takes the occupation of widowed elders as a moderating factor on the effect of faith in traditional culture on the bereavement outcomes.

Growing older indicates a higher risk of going through many life changes. Spousal bereavement is one of the most devastating losses one can experience, and, particularly among elders, can result in adverse consequences (van Baarsen, 2002). CG is the most relevant psychological dimension to bereavement and grief. Generally, it refers to a state of chronic mourning that lasts longer than expected

and that causes impairment in daily functioning (Shear, 2015). The duration criterion for diagnosis after the death of a loved one is 6 months, as accepted by the majority of experts in the field (Jordan & Litz, 2014). In this study, CG functions as the main bereavement outcome to be tested.

Accordingly, the study draws more insights into traditional Chinese culture in the context of grief. This study maintains the following hypotheses about widowed elders: (a) Faith in traditional culture reduces CG among older Chinese in rural areas. (b) The reduction is higher among those with non-peasant work experience than among those with peasant work experience among older Chinese in rural areas.

## 2 | METHODS

### 2.1 | Participants

A sample of 352 participants aged 60 and over was recruited from Yongjia County, a place located in Zhejiang Province of China, in 2017. The total population of Yongjia County in 2017 was 978,454. All townships involved have similar proportions (nearly 17%) of residents who are 60 or older. It is assumed that the death of a spouse is an event that happens at random. Quota sampling was used due to limits in research resources (i.e. time, personnel); it was previously applied by Lu, Lum, and Lou (2016) among Chinese elders. Six townships were randomly chosen from the list of townships in this county. Two to four villages/communities per township were chosen on purpose in order to make the face-to-face interviews cost-effective. In sum, 18 villages/communities were visited to gather information from the participants. Each potential participant was found by convenience and screened by asking questions that were related to his/her age and marital status. Two questions from the Mini-Mental State Examination pertaining to the township they lived and the date when the interview occurred were also asked to screen for cognitive impairment among the sample, along with a question regarding whether he or she was willing to take part in an interview after being informed briefly about the aim of this present study. Only those who were aged 60 and above, had suffered spousal bereavement and were willing to participate in this study without cognitive impairment were included in the sample. In addition, because of the specific status of spousal bereavement the participants were in, many of the questions in the questionnaire dealt with sensitive material that could induce negative moods. Hence, the participants were told that if they felt uncomfortable at any time, they could choose to terminate the interview. This study was approved by the Human Subjects Ethics Subcommittee of the University.

## 2.2 | MEASUREMENTS

### 2.2.1 | Complicated grief

This outcome was measured by the Inventory of Complicated Grief (ICG), which was proposed by Prigerson et al. (1995) and

included a 19-item Likert scale with options ranging from 0 (*never*) to 4 (*completely*). Its Chinese version showed good internal consistency (0.96) in an empirical study by Li et al. (2015). The timing of CG was within the past 2 weeks. Its internal consistency reliability ( $\alpha$ ) was 0.92.

### 2.2.2 | Faith in traditional Chinese culture

A tailored scale combining 10 items was developed with reference to the doctrines of Confucianism and Taoism (see Appendix S1). Each item was coded from 0 to 4, with 0 = none and 4 = all. This scale was used to examine the extent of faith in traditional Chinese culture exhibited by the participants over the last month. The content pertained to fate control, *feng shui*, positive attitude and so forth. The scale had internal consistency reliability ( $\alpha$ ) at 0.76.

### 2.2.3 | Control variables

Demographic variables were controlled for in the analysis. Gender was coded as 0 for male and 1 for female. Age was listed in years. Long-term illness was tested by dichotomised scores (0 = no, 1 = yes). Physical function was scored from 0 to 4, in terms of three types of life activities: brushing and washing, going up and down stairs and dressing and eating, with 0 indicating that the respondent could not do the activity on their own, and 4 meaning they were completely able to do the activity. The scores of the three questions about physical function were summed up for analysis. Finally, living arrangements were coded as 0 (living alone) and 1 (with others, e.g. adult children, grandchildren, relatives or domestic workers). Communist Party membership (CCP) was scaled by two scores: 0 = no and 1 = yes. Religiousness was measured by a dichotomised variable: 0 = none and 1 = any (e.g. ancestor worship, Christianity, Buddhism or Taoism). Education level was rated on a scale of 0 (*illiterate*) to 4 (*institute or college*) and was further categorised as 0 = illiterate or 1 = some education if otherwise. Respondents' previous jobs were designated from a list of six types of occupations: 1 = peasant, 2 = public servant, 3 = blue-collar worker, 4 = soldier, 5 = businessman, 6 = other (e.g. customer service personnel). This variable was also classified into 0 = peasant and 1 = other professional jobs. Personal monthly income was measured in five layers, ranging from 1 = less than 500 RMB to 5 = 3,000 RMB above, with the middle levels being 2 = 500–1,000 RMB, 3 = 1,000–2,000 RMB and 4 = 2,000–3,000 RMB.

Additionally, acquiescence, which indicated the participants' tendency to give extreme scores to all items of the variables regardless of the contents, was also controlled for. It was used to remove the artefacts in the analysis originating from the response style of the participants. By referring to the previous study (Cheung & Yue, 2013), acquiescence was measured by averaging all the rating items in the questionnaire and was included among the control variables along with the other demographic variables.

## 2.3 | Data analysis

Confirmatory factor analysis via AMOS 22.0 was employed to secure the factorial validity of faith in traditional culture. According to criteria suggested by Finney and DiStefano (2006), an item with a kurtosis under seven and skewness under two in absolute terms would be suitable for maximum likelihood estimation. A good fit of the confirmatory factor analysis would have such statistics as  $\chi^2/df \leq 3$ , RMSEA  $\leq 0.08$ , CFI  $\geq 0.90$ , TLI  $\geq 0.90$  (Chen, Sousa, & West, 2005).

To test the moderation model in regression analysis, PROCESS installed in SPSS 22.0 was used in this study (Hayes, 2012). In addition, the chosen inferential method for testing hypotheses was bootstrapping, rather than  $p$ -value, since it is more powerful and is not based on the assumption of the normal distribution (Preacher & Hayes, 2004). Thus, the bootstrapping approach is preferable to  $p$ -value if their results contradict each other. In the initial phase, a model with an uncentred interaction term was run by SPSS 22.0 to get the amount of variance accounted for by the predictors with and without the interaction. The result showed a significant  $R^2$  change ( $0.017$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) between the model without interaction and the model with interaction, indicating potentially significant moderation in the relationship between faith and CG. Afterwards, data were standardised before using PROCESS for the test of the moderation effect. The number of bootstrapping runs was 5,000.

## 3 | RESULTS

### 3.1 | Characteristics of the sample

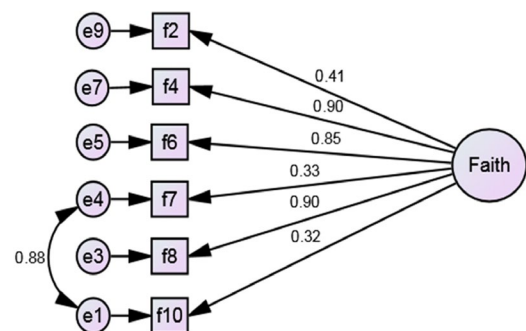
As shown in Table 1, 78.4% of the sample was female, and their mean age was 77.63 years. Nearly half of the participants (49.7%) mentioned that they did not have any form of long-term illness, and, similarly, about half of them (46.3%) were living with others (e.g. adult children, grandchildren, relatives). The mean physical function among the bereaved participants was 11.09. CCP was categorised as 0 = no and 1 = yes. The majority of the participants (86.4%) were religious, and 77.3% of them were illiterate. Peasants comprised 71.3% of the participants. As for personal income, 51.1% of the participants stayed at the level of less than 500 RMB, and 26.7% of the participants could earn money from 500 to 1,000 RMB. The remaining participants could earn more than 1,000 RMB per month. The means of faith in traditional culture and CG were 19.57 and 14.68 respectively.

### 3.2 | Confirmatory factor analysis

In the initial phase, the results demonstrated that one item of faith in traditional culture was non-significant and three indicators were low-loaded ( $<0.3$ ). This non-significant item pertains to the perceived helplessness of the survivors when facing the death of a spouse. The low-loading items are pertinent to fate beliefs, perceived powerlessness, comeuppance and talking about the death in public. After removing these items and one instance of releasing the relationship between two error items, the final model suggested an

**TABLE 1** Characteristics of the sample

|                              | Coding | N (%)      | Mean (SD)     |
|------------------------------|--------|------------|---------------|
| Female                       | 0, 1   | 276 (78.4) |               |
| Age                          | Years  |            | 77.63 (8.74)  |
| Long-term illness            | 0, 1   |            |               |
| No                           |        | 175 (49.7) |               |
| Yes                          |        | 177 (50.3) |               |
| Physical function            | 0–12   |            | 11.09 (2.56)  |
| Living arrangement           | 1–6    |            |               |
| Living alone                 |        | 189 (53.7) |               |
| Others                       |        | 163 (46.3) |               |
| Community Party member       | 1–3    | 17 (4.8)   |               |
| Not party member             | 1–3    | 335 (95.2) |               |
| Religiousness                | 0, 1   |            |               |
| None                         |        | 48 (13.6)  |               |
| Any                          |        | 304 (86.4) |               |
| Education level              | 1–5    |            |               |
| Illiterate                   |        | 272 (77.3) |               |
| Some education               |        | 80 (22.7)  |               |
| Previous job                 | 1–6    |            |               |
| Peasants                     |        | 251 (71.3) |               |
| Other professional jobs      |        | 101 (28.7) |               |
| Personal income              | 1–5    |            |               |
| Less than 500 RMB            |        | 180 (51.1) |               |
| 500–1,000 RMB                |        | 94 (26.7)  |               |
| 1,000–2,000 RMB              |        | 42 (11.9)  |               |
| 2,000–3,000 RMB              |        | 19 (5.4)   |               |
| More than 3,000 RMB          |        | 17 (4.8)   |               |
| Faith in traditional culture | 0–4    |            | 19.57 (8.95)  |
| Complicated grief            | 0–4    |            | 14.68 (13.49) |



**FIGURE 1** Confirmatory factor analysis of faith in traditional culture. Note: f2, f4, f6, f7, f8, f10 are items measuring the faith. [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]

acceptable fit:  $\chi^2/df = 1.5$ , RMSEA = 0.037, CFI = 0.997, TLI = 0.995. Figure 1 showed that the factor loadings ranged from 0.32 to 0.90, with all of the items being significantly loaded on the latent factor of faith in traditional Chinese culture ( $p < 0.001$ ). This adapted way of

measuring faith in traditional Chinese culture was thus subsequently usable in regression analysis.

### 3.3 | Regression analysis

The regression model was reliable,  $F(13) = 13.69$ ,  $p < 0.001$ . Faith in traditional Chinese culture negatively significantly influenced CG among Chinese elders experiencing conjugal bereavement ( $\beta = -0.138$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). The interaction term showed a negatively significant effect on CG ( $\beta = -0.171$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) (see Table 2). The inferential test for the significance of the relationships to be tested above turned out that the bootstrapping confidence intervals did not contain zero at 95% level, which means that the significance of the coefficients was highly credible. Figure 2 visualises the results of the moderation analysis. The levels of faith in traditional Chinese culture were classified as low, average and high according to one unit of standard deviation. The simple slope for the peasant group was  $-0.029$ , which was not significant. In the non-peasant group, the slope was statistically significant and in the same direction ( $\beta = -0.407$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). The slope of the line in the group of other professional jobs was steeper than that in the group of peasants. That means that the bereaved elderly who occupied professional jobs showed more changes in CG than their peasant counterparts.

## 4 | DISCUSSION

This study verifies the buffering effect of traditional culture on outcomes among bereaved elders. The results conflict with the quantitative study of Hui et al. (2016), in which fate control beliefs negatively predicted mental health in bereavement. Belief in fate control features in traditional Chinese culture and actually

includes internal control (personal agency) in addition to external control (Cheng, Cheung, Chio, & Chan, 2013). Thus, the inconsistency in the results is feasible. In the study of Hui et al. (2016), the average age of the Chinese participants was about 24 years old, and bereavement referred to the loss of a family member. In this sense, the death might cause self-agency to be devalued more intensively than external control among the younger generation. However, elders are more susceptible to external factors (Molinari & Niederehe, 1985), and are more likely to endorse acceptance when addressing areas of concern and to embrace a sense of control coming from others, such as belief in a higher power (Shapiro, Sandman, Grossman, & Grossman, 1995). In effect, belief in fate did not demonstrate the same significant effect on psychological health among bereaved elderly in this study as it did in other studies. This study broadens the horizons by extending the domain of traditional culture, instead of only focusing on fate control beliefs. It also includes basic beliefs in *feng shui*, the netherworld, ghosts, and the like. One common theme among those additional beliefs is the existence of external powers. Therefore, it is inferable that the elderly people undergoing spousal bereavement would identify with the views of traditional Chinese culture when coping with the loss of their romantic partners. Accepting the doctrines of traditional culture might strengthen the sense of control, through which psychological distress can be ameliorated, given the positive effect of sense of control on mental health (Chou & Chi, 2001). The buffering effect of traditional culture on CG is reasonable according to the inference above. In addition, traditional religious beliefs are helpful in reducing death anxiety (Lange & Houran, 1997). In this line, traditional religious beliefs may help the survivors prepare for the death of their spouses.

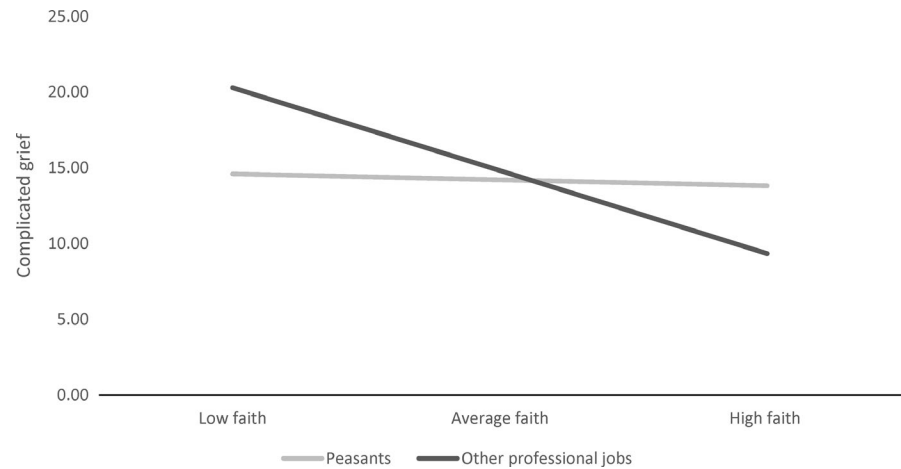
In terms of the moderating role of the elders' occupation before retirement, the results suggest that the effect of traditional culture on CG is stronger among the elderly people who had professional

**TABLE 2** Standardised effects on complicated grief

| Variables                    | Coefficients | SE    | <i>p</i>     | 95% lower bound | 95% upper bound |
|------------------------------|--------------|-------|--------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Faith in traditional culture | -0.138       | 0.056 | <sup>a</sup> | -0.247          | -0.028          |
| Faith × previous jobs        | -0.171       | 0.045 | <sup>c</sup> | -0.260          | -0.082          |
| Female                       | -0.053       | 0.051 | 0.293        | -0.153          | 0.046           |
| Age                          | -0.169       | 0.049 | <sup>c</sup> | -0.266          | -0.073          |
| Previous job                 | 0.021        | 0.051 | 0.678        | -0.080          | 0.122           |
| Long-term illness            | -0.087       | 0.046 | 0.060        | -0.178          | 0.004           |
| Physical function            | -0.165       | 0.050 | <sup>b</sup> | -0.264          | -0.066          |
| CCP membership               | -0.065       | 0.049 | 0.190        | -0.162          | 0.032           |
| Religiousness                | -0.061       | 0.050 | 0.218        | -0.158          | 0.036           |
| Education level              | -0.052       | 0.053 | 0.330        | -0.157          | 0.053           |
| Personal income              | -0.080       | 0.050 | 0.113        | -0.178          | 0.019           |
| Living arrangement           | -0.087       | 0.048 | 0.071        | -0.181          | 0.007           |
| Acquiescence                 | 0.626        | 0.056 | <sup>c</sup> | 0.515           | 0.736           |

<sup>a</sup> $p < 0.05$ , <sup>b</sup> $p < 0.01$ , <sup>c</sup> $p < 0.001$ .

**FIGURE 2** Relationships between faith and grief between occupations.



jobs previously than among their peasant counterparts. In a study by Ardakani, Baneshi, Taravatmanesh, Taravatmanesh, and Zolala (2017), the previously employed elderly had larger social networks and higher levels of satisfaction with social support from others. It is highly possible that the stronger buffering effect of traditional culture on CG among the elderly people who were previously employed is enhanced by their social satisfaction. According to Stylianou and Vachon (1993), the viewpoints held by society have a powerful impact on widowed people through social interaction. In this regard, a greater amount of social interaction might provide the previously employed in widowhood with more perspectives, including traditional cultural ideas, to help them cope with an adverse life event. It is also worth noting that the high level of CG at the beginning of the line (other professional jobs) suggested that employment in previous life was a potential risk factor for CG. The result is reasonable as Kyraiou et al. (2017) stated that people with a professional occupation before retirement would experience a larger life transition, which might lead to greater dissatisfaction in their life after retirement. Such a life transition might lower their preparedness and ability to adapt following the death of their spouse.

In view of the aforementioned strengths that the non-peasant participants possess and the unclear effect of faith in traditional culture on CG among the peasant group, it seems that social resources, where peasants are concerned, hint at the point in grief outcomes where internal resources (faith in traditional culture) are ineffective. This notion accords with the finding that social resources would have a positive effect on cognitive functioning among older adults (Kelly et al., 2017). Helping the peasant group go through this painful life experience matters, since the majority of the population in China, especially in rural areas, are peasants. One approach might be periodic social activities for peasants, which can potentially enhance social networks and support among them. Another promising approach would be educational programmes aiming to introduce traditional cultural views about death and life to peasants. Faith in traditional culture and social resources function together to effectively handle life stress.

The limitations of this study suggest that there is room for improvement in the future. First, the relatively small sample size and

quota sampling make the representativeness of this study imperfect. With more research resources, studies may take advantage of more representative sampling methods to obtain results that are more generalisable. Second, the cross-sectional design of this study cannot ensure the causal inference in the relationships found. To achieve such a goal, longitudinal data are necessary to enlarge the knowledge of the relationship between traditional culture and grief outcomes. Third, the items of faith in traditional culture were extracted from Confucian and Taoist doctrines by the researcher; they may not cover the full breadth of the underpinnings of interest, and do not include the underlying Buddhist views, although Buddhism is one of the leading systems of thought in China (Guang, 2013). Qualitative feedback is promising for improving the content richness and hence is highly recommended in further efforts. Last but not least, given that average bereavement duration in the sample was 13.87 years, time is a major factor that determines the different patterns of grief experience in the bereaved (Chan & Chan, 2011), and whether the negative relationship between faith in traditional culture and CG is still tenable is pending and deserves to be explored further.

In spite of the aforementioned limitations, this study still makes important contributions. To begin with, it broadens the knowledge of the experience of grief in a Chinese context where death counts as taboo and slips from public conversation. This study shows that traditional Chinese culture does help relieve distress. Second, this study is worthy of being read in that it focuses on the aged population and contributes ideas for experts to help the elderly people cope with the loss of their spouses, or even other losses. Successful ageing is a major concern for many researchers and practitioners for the elderly people. As part of the experience of later life, dealing with bereavement is unavoidable in this part of life. Therefore, the results of this study pave the way for approaches to improving life after bereavement. For example, education plans on the topic of traditional culture related to life and death can be implemented to enhance the mental resources of the elderly people experiencing bereavement. In addition, occupational therapy could be considered because of its positive effects, such as preserving autonomy, enhancing integrity and increasing sense of safety (Trace & Howell, 1991). If talking about death is constrained in the Chinese context,



then taking action may make it easier for the bereaved to deal with hardship. For instance, the bereaved elderly who were employed before retirement can possibly continue to do something that they do when they take over an occupation, which is also beneficial for them in dealing with bereavement. Specially, elderly peasants undergoing bereavement can learn other life skills and enlarge their social networks, with the ultimate goal being their improved physical and mental health, as proved by Jackson, Carlson, Mandel, Zemke, and Clark (1998). Besides, younger generations, mostly born in the era of economic reform, keep a distance from traditional knowledge, particularly concerning death and bereavement and thus have little chance of becoming familiar with such cultural opinions (Mak, 2011). This study shows potential for providing the younger generation with more traditional cultural views of death.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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## SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting information may be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of the article.

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